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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version  
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

#### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Nkooe, E. S. (2018). A Lefebvrian Analysis of Public Spaces in Mangaung, South Africa. *Urban Planning*, 3(3), 26-39.  
<https://doi.org/10.17645/up.v3i3.1363>

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Article

## A Lefebvrian Analysis of Public Spaces in Mangaung, South Africa

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Submitted: 15 January 2018 | Accepted: 13 March 2018 | Published: 12 June 2018

### Abstract

Hoffman Square, Driehoek Neighbourhood Park and Old Regional Park are public spaces in Mangaung. Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space and Elements of Rhythmanalysis* are explored in the analysis of these public spaces' organised representations, representational uses and rhythmic spatial practices. This article found that: (1) public spaces in Mangaung are lived spaces that are regularly appropriated by inhabitants whose unpoliced social practices of vandalism and littering—along with the harsh regional climate—deteriorate the physical quality of the public spaces, secreting environmental incivility in the public spaces; (2) cyclical rhythms of night and day times have a practical impact on the spatial practices of each public space in spite of their design and location. For example, day-time entails high and rapid levels of public space uses while night-time diffuses these dynamics significantly; and (3) Mangaung's spatial plans encourage the liberal uses of its public spaces however, it fails to enforce its by-laws to curb experienced physical decay of, and environmental incivility in, the public spaces. This increases the vulnerability of its public spaces to external shocks—emanating from nature and society—thus depriving the public spaces of an opportunity to be perceived as alternatives for urban regeneration and local economic revitalisation.

### Keywords

Bloemfontein; Henri Lefebvre; public space; secondary cities; Thaba Nchu

### Issue

This article is part of the issue “Urban Planning and the Spatial Ideas of Henri Lefebvre”, edited by Michael E. Leary-Owhin (London South Bank University, UK).

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### 1. Introduction

Public spaces—like streets, squares and parks—facilitate social interactions, movements and flows of people and things in cities. They are also political sites for contested social relationships. Tiananmen Square in Beijing, was the site of mass demonstration against the Chinese state's occupation of Japan in 1919, and in 1986, students turned to Tiananmen Square to protest against the state's anti-democratic representations in the contested public space (Hershkovitz, 1993; Lee, 2009). In Cairo, inhabitants occupied the forbidden public space of Tahrir Square in 2011, demanding democratic change and an end to autocratic rule (Said, 2014; Salama, 2013). In 2012, US inhabitants took to Wall Street protesting against global capitalism. The latter had caused the forced foreclosure on home mortgages, resulting in nation-wide unrest and homelessness (Chomsky, 2012).

In Spain, inhabitants occupied the Puerta del Sol and Plaça Catalunya squares in 2011–2012 protesting against high unemployment and a lack of political representation (Dhaliwal, 2012). For South Africa, post-apartheid cities and their public spaces were the material sites of mass political struggle against the apartheid state (1948–1994), which kept different races and classes in separate areas while, in a multiracial society, preserving public spaces beyond the urban realm for the minority white population (Hindson, 1987; Lemon, 1991). After the 1994 political changes, urban public spaces underwent radical transformation. Historically segregated groups responded differently to the political transition from apartheid to democracy. While fear and crime caused whites to relocate from post-apartheid inner cities to suburbs to live in gated residential developments (Dirsuweit, 2002; Dirsuweit & Wafer, 2006; Landman, 2006), Africans flooded inner cities, changing the

socio-economic structure of post-apartheid urban landscapes. These changes led to a radical wave of privatisation of public spaces, perpetuating apartheid spatial exclusion and social segregation (Ramoroka & Tsheola, 2014). Urban scholars argue against the economic privatisation of South Africa's public spaces through neoliberal policies and city-improvement districts (CIDs) which undermine the processes of the democratic project (Lemanski, 2004; Peyroux, 2006; Spocter, 2017). This article, in the spirit of engaging in a global conversation about Lefebvre's spatial ideas, investigates the everyday uses of public spaces in the post-apartheid South African city of Mangaung. Research content for this article was generated through spatial ethnographic techniques of participant observation in the identified public spaces, which generated more than 20 hours of interview data over a four-month period from mid-June to late-October 2017.

## 2. The Production of Space and Rhythmanalysis

This article explores two translated works by Henri Lefebvre (1901–1991), namely, *The Production of Space* (The POS) and *Elements of Rhythmanalysis* (ERA). The POS is widely recognised for influencing the 'spatial turn' in the social sciences, humanities, geography, planning and architecture (Dorsch, 2013; Elden, 2004b). The POS is a science of space that concerns itself with the "use of space, its qualitative properties" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 404). Lefebvre (1991) presents a spatial triad of three interrelated elements involved in the production of space. 'Representations of space' is the conceptualised space of planners, architects and other specialists who order and "divide space into separate elements that can be recombined at will" (Ronneberger, 2008, p. 137). It is the 'conceived space' of "a certain type of artist with a scientific bent", the dominant space in society that identifies "what is lived and what is perceived with what is conceived" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 38). In its higher complex, conceived space is also the 'abstract space' of "the bourgeoisie and of capitalism...in thrall to both knowledge and power" (Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 50–57). It is, as Lefebvre notes, an institutional, political space. 'Representational space' refers to space as directly lived (experienced) through its associated images and symbols. It is the 'lived space' "of 'inhabitants' and 'users' but also of some artists and...a few writers and philosophers" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 39). Lefebvre considers the 'user' and 'inhabitants' to be the "underprivileged and marginal...everyone—and no one" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 362). This is the dominated space in society. Lived space is often linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life; it embraces "the body...everyday life...desire...difference" (Lefebvre, 1991; Merrifield, 1995, p. 297). 'Spatial practice', or the 'perceived space', refers to people's interaction with the sensory space of the built environment, along with its road networks that inform daily routines (Wolf & Mahaffey, 2016). It "embraces production and reproduction, and the particular locations and spatial sets character-

istic of each social formation", ensuring "continuity and some degree of cohesion" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 33). To the user and the inhabitant, "this cohesion implies a guaranteed level of competence and a specific level of performance" (Lefebvre, 1991). Each element of the spatial triad contributes differently to the social production of space according to each space's attributes, qualities, historical period of analysis and the mode of production (Lefebvre, 1991). Lefebvre's spatial triad has been used across scientific disciplines and urban geographical contexts, including postcolonial urban Africa. In Dar es Salaam, the spatial triad was used to unearth informal sector operations in an effort to integrate both the sector's activities in contemporary understandings of the production of urban public space and its contestation by the spatially engaged informal sector (Babere, 2015). In Blantyre and Lilongwe, Mwachungu (2014) used the spatial triad to understand the role of contemporary planners versus social struggles for spatial appropriation since planners' spatial conceptions differ significantly from users' experiences (or uses) of urban space. In Newtown, Johannesburg, Nkooe (2014, 2015) used the spatial triad to grasp the organisation and use-politics of Mary Fitzgerald Square, where the struggle between conceived and lived interests over the public space—in the form of strict policing and privatisation—resulted in the alienation of inhabitants. The above case-studies confirm Wolf and Mahaffey's (2016) Lefebvrian analysis of urban public space as an ongoing process of production and co-production between public spatial users and public spatial planners. For this study, Lefebvre's (1991) spatial triad is fused with Lefebvre's (2004) 'rhythmic' concepts for public spatial analysis. Lefebvre maintains that if empty abstractions are to be avoided, spatial analyses must consider the influence of time and energy in the analysed spatial context. In the same way, the spatial triad should be used to grasp the concrete. Treating it as an abstract 'model' makes it lose its force (Lefebvre, 1991). Therefore, when 'space' is evoked through the spatial triad, we must indicate what occupies space and how it does so. When 'time' is evoked, we must state what moves or changes therein. This is also true of 'energy': it must be noted as deployed in space (Lefebvre, 1991). Time is distinguishable yet inseparable from location (space), motion (energy) and repetition (Elden, 2004a; Heidegger, 2010; Lefebvre, 1991). According to Lefebvre, the space-time-energy trialectic, or 'rhythm', is important for putting the finishing touches to the exposition of the production of space, in which Nietzschean time—as "...cyclical, repetitious"—is prioritised over Marxist time of historicity informed by forces of production instead of rhythm (Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 12, 22, 169–182, 404–405). Lefebvre's Nietzschean or rhythmic time—cyclical, repetitious—is "viewed through the dual lens of space and time, of cyclical repetition and linear repetition" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 175). Cyclical rhythms are cosmological phenomena, e.g., night, day, winter and thirst, while linear rhythms are repetitive social activi-

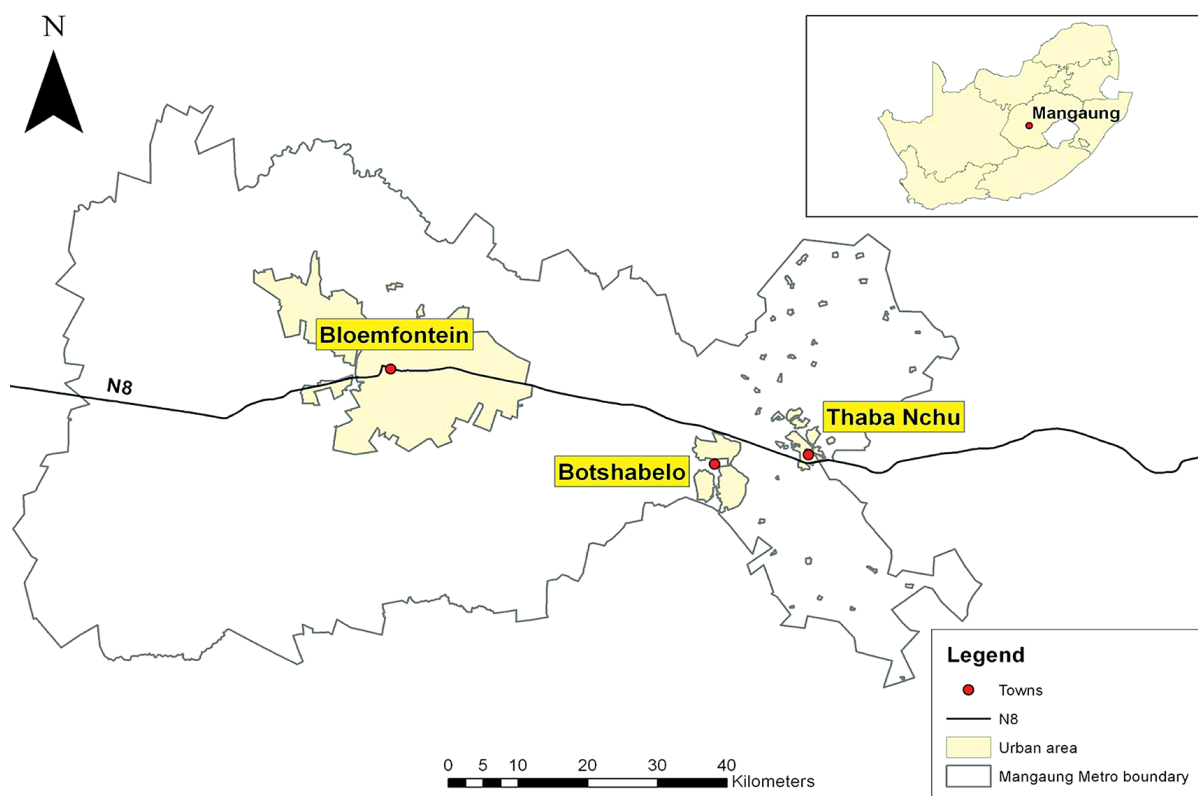
ties like fêtes, calendars, ceremonies and celebrations (Lefebvre, 2004). Linear and cyclical rhythms are interactive and intertwined processes and movements through which all spatial practice is cyclical repetition through linear repetition (Lefebvre, 2004). Lefebvre is more explicit about rhythm and rhythm-analysis in ERA than in The POS. Rhythm is the interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy (Elden, 2004a; Lefebvre, 2004). According to Lefebvre, ERA is “a new field of knowledge: the analysis of rhythms; with practical consequences” (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 3). ERA is definitely not a separate science (Elden, 2004b). Instead, it forms part of a time-fragmented *oeuvre* that leads to a unitary theory, the aim of which is “to discover or construct a theoretical unity” between separately apprehended ‘fields’ (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 11), which, in the context of this article, include the separately apprehended conceptual frameworks informing Lefebvre’s The POS in relation to ERA. Whereas The POS focuses on spatial uses and the social reproduction of space, ERA is centred on everyday life and the conflict between repetitive nature-rhythms and socio-economic processes (Meyer, 2008). The POS is often missed as a type of ‘rhythm’ analysis despite Lefebvre’s (1991) insistence that the production of space would take a *rhythm* analysis to be complete (not completed). ERA is therefore perceived as ‘separate’ from The POS because it was Lefebvre’s ‘last work’ (Degros, Knierbein, & Madanipour, 2014, p. 3; Elden, 2004a, p. 194, 2004b, p. vii). Henri Lefebvre and Catherine Régulier’s 1985 and 1986 rhythmanalysis of Mediterranean cities were—and are—the last *oeuvres* Lefebvre produced before his death in 1991. Together with earlier works on rhythm—originally published in French in 1992—these projects were later incorporated into the general discourse of the 2004 translated ERA, which “brings together all of Lefebvre’s writings on this theme” (Elden, 2004a, p. viii; Simonsen, 2005). Lefebvre encrypted aspects of ERA in The POS—originally published in French in 1974—which as Elden (2004b) notes, is permeated with rhythmic tension. Lefebvre and Régulier conceded that the Mediterranean cities projects were “a fragment of a more complete study [The POS], or an introduction to [the Mediterranean cities] study” (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 87). For the purposes of this article, Lefebvre’s (1991, 2004) spatial triad and ERA concepts are fused together to offer a rhythmic, spatial analysis of Mangaung’s public spaces.

### 3. Mangaung: A South African Secondary City

Mangaung, situated in the Free State Province of South Africa, has an unusual urban geography. It has three human settlements that differ in terms of their production history, surface area and economic importance in the urban region. These settlements include: (1) Bloemfontein City—the birthplace of the African National Congress (ANC), the judicial capital of the country, the provincial capital and home of the University of the Free State

and the Central University of Technology; (2) Botshabelo, former Bantustan of the Basotho; and (3) Thaba Nchu, former Bantustan of the Batswana (Free State Business, 2017; Krige, 1991; Marais, Van Rooyen, Lenka, & Cloete, 2014). These geographically distant settlements are integrated by the N8 transnational road network (see Figure 1). Mangaung’s tripartite urban geography is inclusive of the surrounding rural areas engaged in commercial and subsistence farming (Free State Business, 2017; Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality, 2017). In 2011, the Municipal Demarcation Board declared Mangaung a metropolitan municipality and a functional urban area alongside the country’s dominant metropolitan municipalities of Johannesburg, Tshwane, eThekweni (Durban) and Cape Town (OECD, 2011). In the same year, the metropolitan government of Mangaung—with a fluctuating regional population of approximately 747,431–850,000 inhabitants—was formed, following local government elections (Free State Business, 2017; Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality, 2017). In comparison with the country’s top four metropolitan areas, the South African Cities Network (SACN) classifies Mangaung as a “secondary” or “intermediate” city (SACN, 2014). Mangaung’s regionalist (provincial) focus and the strong economic links between its urban capital, the surrounding semi-urban Bantustans and other rural areas, places it in the secondary cities category (Krige, 1991; SACN, 2014). Compared with Johannesburg or Mumbai, for example, Mangaung is not a ‘world-class’ or ‘mega’ city. It is an ‘intermediate-sized’ or ‘second-order’ city with an undiversified regional economy and a relatively small urban population (Hart & Rogerson, 1989; Rogerson, 2016). Secondary cities are a special category of cities in developing country regions. They were developed in the 1970s as former colonial settlements and traditional centres for trade, transportation, administration and cultural activities. Post-colonial urban governments sought to use these inherited city clusters as catalytic stimulants to the ailing rural economies of surrounding settlements, primate city migration absorbers with economic trickle down effects for the lagging and depressed regions (Rondinelli, 1983).

Despite their roles in national economic development and counter-urbanization, secondary cities are often neglected in research by urban scholars who prioritize global or mega-cities instead (Marais, et al., 2014; Rogerson, 2016). Africa’s secondary cities gained research attention in the 1980s development discourses rather than in mainstream urban geography (Hart & Rogerson, 1989; Robinson, 2002). Recognition of the urban value of secondary cities to national economic development and urbanisation has, however, renewed geographers’ interests in them. Perceived as ‘new frontiers’ for urban policy research (Rogerson, 2016), secondary cities are identified as key research areas more so for the practical role they play in creating an integrated settlement pattern of urban-rural systems (Hart & Rogerson, 1989; Otiso, 2005; Robinson, 2002; Rogerson, 2016).



**Figure 1.** Mangaung's political urban geography. Source: Marais et al. (2014).

Mangaung's intermediate size does not detract from its spatial quality as a functional urban area that undergoes socio-spatially transformative processes similar to those experienced in other cities. Its classification indicates that it is a different city that belongs to a different category or class of cities (Robinson, 2002; Rondinelli, 1983). This article contributes to an emerging body of geographical research on the South African city of Mangaung and its public spaces. In the process, the article seeks to break the established "academic position that regarded Bantustans as a comic opera unworthy of serious attention" (Ramutsindela, 2001, p. 176) through Lefebvre's (1991, 2004) spatial triad and rhythmic concepts.

#### 4. Bloemfontein CBD: A Brief Introduction

Hoffman Square is a public space situated in Bloemfontein's central business district (CBD). It is as old as the post-colonial and post-apartheid city it inhabits (Van der Westhuizen, 2011). In its political production, Bloemfontein city denied blacks—Africans, Indians and Coloureds—physical and social access to its built environment (Krige, 1991). The advent of democracy in 1994 saw Bloemfontein's white citizens and capital emigrating from the CBD to segregated communities that spread in all four directions from the compact inner city, thus rapidly changing Bloemfontein's spatial form through suburban residential developments (Ferreira & Visser, 2015; Hoogendoorn et al., 2008). The sprawl of gated communities or "high-density walled townhouse

complexes" in Mangaung, is an important process that continues to redefine the changing character of the post-apartheid city (Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality, 2017, p. 191). While Bloemfontein's CBD functions have emigrated from the inner city (Hoogendoorn et al., 2008), the physical landscape has remained intact. The task for the Mangaung metropolitan administration is therefore to revive its declined inner cities in Bloemfontein and Thaba Nchu. Interestingly, Hoffman Square and the general "public spatial environment" surrounding Mangaung's CBDs are barely recognised or identified as practical tools with which to regenerate the stagnant CBDs (Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality, 2017, p. 204). Africans, once denied the "right to urban life, to renewed centrality, to places of encounter and exchange, to life rhythms and time uses" (Mitchell, 2003, p. 19) in Bloemfontein, became the city's *de jure* citizens from 1994 onwards. Since then, little has been done by researchers—Kotze's (2003) study being the exception—to advance our understanding of post-apartheid Bloemfontein and its different (or African) inhabitants through its public spaces than through the lens of gated residential sprawl. This study lays the foundation for a conceptual analysis of Mangaung's public spaces and their social reproduction by African inhabitants.

##### 4.1. Hoffman Square

Hoffman Square is a conceived space that has been designed and redesigned by planners, architects and



statesmen who conceived “laws, decrees and ordinances” regulating conditions for its development (Lefebvre, 1991; Strohmayer, 2016, p. 55). Since its colonial production, the Square has undergone a series of physical changes and appropriation (see attached Appendix):

The 1970s design looked weird. There were some buildings and some open spaces on the square that we had to demolish to get it flat. (F. Karstel, personal communication, July 27, 2017)

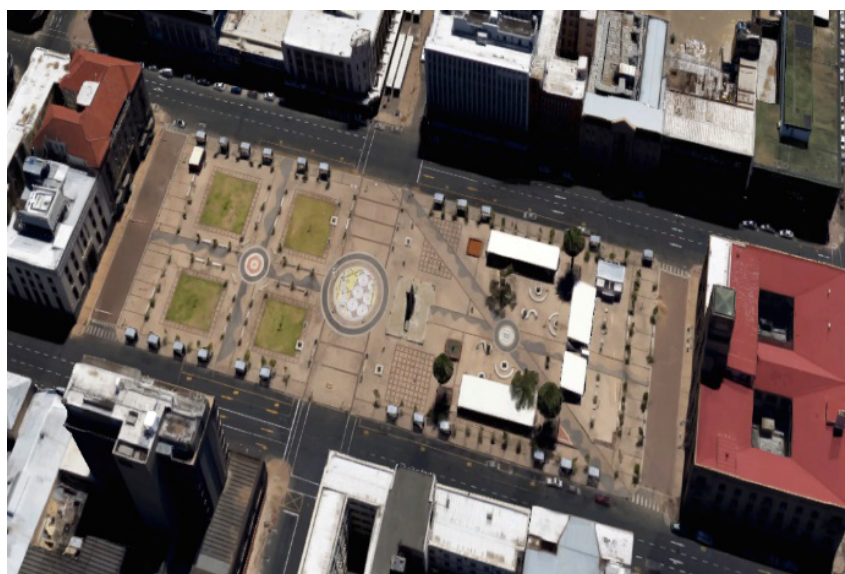
Mangaung imagined an inclusive ‘world-class’ square with green elements that have always been a part of the Square’s identity:

The municipality wanted to have an open square, flat and ‘world class’. They...wanted smart elements...a ‘greening’ of the square with new transportation elements...a square for people. (F. Karstel, personal communication, July 27, 2017)

Hoffman Square is a semi-green public space in Bloemfontein’s inner city. It is a focal point of cultural exchange, civic pride and community expression (Zhai, 2014). Its design inspires human presence, movements and relationships between itself and individuals interacting in it (Koochaki, Shahbazi, & Anjomshoa, 2015). It is surrounded by several colonial and modern buildings (Figure 2). There are four main public transportation shelters and several minor ones lining the two streets running parallel to the square. There are also trees, seating areas, waste bins, some lawns, a toilet, artworks, a 2012 memorial placard to an ANC activist, and, the World War I and World War II war monument. Hoffman Square is therefore the urban stage on and through which inhabitants’ spatial competencies and their associated social performances in the city play out.

Compared with, for example, Johannesburg’s Mary Fitzgerald Square, Hoffman Square is a public space par excellence. It is publicly owned and managed by Mangaung for the ‘public’ society to use. The Square’s ‘publicness’ is determined by its public management and public uses (Varna & Tiesdell, 2010). The ‘public’ in this regard are ordinary people or Lefebvre’s (1991) users and inhabitants. The ‘public spaces’ they use *invite* rather than *discourage* active participation in the reshaping of the urban society (Strohmayer, 2016). Hoffman Square is a ‘public’ public space. It is a square for the people, a *representational* or ‘lived’ space (Lefebvre, 1991). As lived space, the Square is passively experienced by Africans and the few whites who utilise it. A conceived space is passively experienced by users who do not stand before the public space or in it as one would stand before a painting, a mirror or work of art. As Lefebvre (1991) notes, users generally know that they have a space (or not) even if they have no say in its conceived representations and symbolism. Hoffman Square’s users have no direct influence on the changing nature of the Square’s design and its symbolic representations. This despite Mangaung’s public participation processes particularly for spatial projects affecting local communities. Since it is a conceived space that inhabitants are free to appropriate, Hoffman Square is a vibrant public space in which daily routine is perceived in its unfettered diversity and simultaneity.

Figure 3 depicts Hoffman Square in active use. The figure is an expression of the interaction between cyclical (diurnal) and linear (social) rhythms. To the homeless, the Square is a place for sleeping. To others, it is a place of temporary rest, selling, buying, cycling, skateboarding and exchanging information. This cacophony of social practices sets Hoffman Square and its war monument in motion. The war monument (Figure 3) is commanding. It draws users of the Square to its space like pins to a mag-



**Figure 2.** Contemporary Hoffman Square in Bloemfontein. Source: Google Maps.

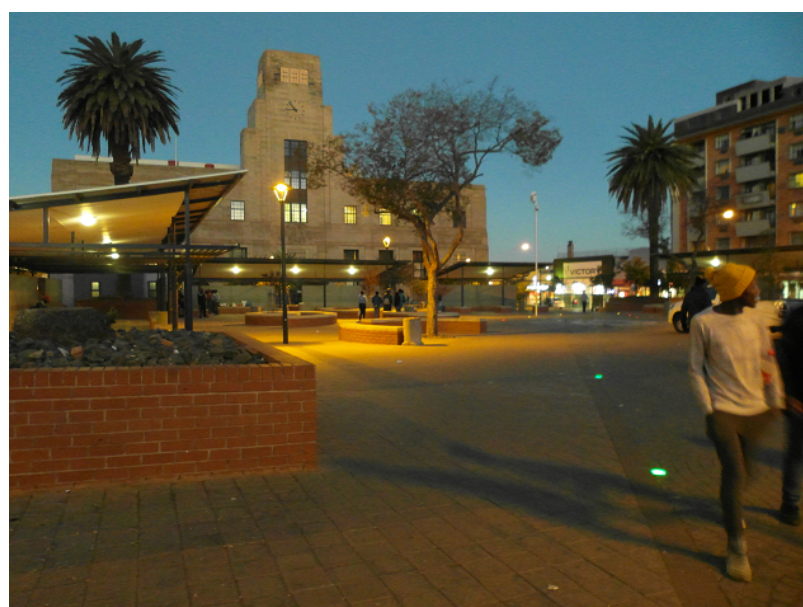


**Figure 3.** Appropriating Hoffman Square. Source: photograph by author.

net. It creates an incessant spectacle between itself and users who take pictures in front of it night and day. The secretion of a clandestine tourist effect by the war monument that is managed by Free State Heritage, evokes heterotopia. According to Foucault (1984/1967, pp. 3–4), heterotopia is “something like counter-sites...effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites...found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted”. Lefebvre (1991) considers heterotopias to be mutually repellent spaces whose utopias (urban ideals) are occupied by the symbolic (lived) and the imaginary (conceived). Therefore, Hoffman Square’s mutually repellent political heritage sites—along with the Africans that were once excluded in Bloemfontein—represent

utopian heterotopias. As time passes, the diurnal-social rhythms depicted in Figure 3 give way to a nocturnal-social rhythm that “eats bit by bit into the night” (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 74). At night the number of bodies deployed in Hoffman Square shrinks. Some users linger in the Square after work and school to escape the boredom of domestic life, revealing for the context, that “night does not interrupt...diurnal rhythms” but rather “modifies them...slows them down” (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 30), as indicated in Figure 4.

Though body (energy) reduction in the Square is also influenced by the declined state of the CBD, LED lighting however makes up for this. The Square’s lighting systems—together with surrounding traffic, and street



**Figure 4.** Night-time uses of Hoffman Square. Source: photograph by author.

and buildings lights—inspire its night-time uses. The availability of free Wi-Fi at Hoffman Square also encourages its nocturnal uses. Amin (2015) considers this technological dimension and function of a square to be an expression of its summoning effect. Strangely, spatial struggles for access to, and uses of, Hoffman Square among its users, and between its users and Mangaung are barely visible. Conversations with users however soon revealed the concealed tension between ordinary users and the homeless. The homeless—called ‘mabaida’ in local slang—use the Square like everyone else. They inhabit it, making full and complete usage of its moments and places (see Figure 3). Yet in the public space, the social practices of the homeless rather than their physical presence at Hoffman Square, is perceived as arrhythmic:

We don’t like ‘mabaida’, they’re a nuisance. (User 1, personal communication, August 11, 2017)

I’m irritated by these guys, because you can’t enjoy your food...they ask for your drink. They...sniff glue...have runny noses...it’s disgusting. (User 2, personal communication, August 11, 2017)

Large amounts of unpredictable homeless...in your face, smoking glue....We don’t want to chase them away because that is also their home. (A. Meyer, personal communication, July 27, 2017)

Being part of the lived space in Hoffman Square, the homeless are not obliged to obey the socially accepted norms or rules set by others in the space (Lefebvre, 1991). Together with a diversity of other users of the Square, the homeless share “a sociological relation of the individual to the group...and...a relation with the largest public space...society” (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 95). Hoffman Square is therefore a differential space in which “differences endure or arise on the margins of the homogenized realm” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 373). Different people see one another and are seen there. In Hoffman Square, individuals are at liberty to perform their activities but not through the negotiation of physical space as Wolf and Mahaffey (2016) note. Hoffman Square’s homeless, for example, are not disturbed by the judgemental glares of other users in the public space, nor are they compelled to negotiate their uses of the space with different others.

#### 4.2. Thaba Nchu CBD: A Brief Introduction

Thaba Nchu is Mangaung’s oldest human settlement (Molema, 1966). Compared with Bloemfontein and Botshabelo, it is the smallest geographical settlement (see Figure 1), with the smallest human population and a scattered spatial pattern of 37 villages (Krige, 1991; Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality, 2017). In terms of urbanisation, Thaba Nchu is the youngest if not ‘least developed’ settlement in Mangaung. It is still experiencing radical spatial changes to its traditionally rural geography.

The establishment of a modern CBD, a modern town plan and architecture together with the staggered introduction of green spaces around the CBD, signify urbanisation (Mangaung Local Municipality, 2010). Today, historical processes, underinvestment, post-apartheid deindustrialisation and vandalisation of abandoned property, have turned Thaba Nchu into a derelict rural town with a stagnant CBD and a decaying property landscape (Mangaung Local Municipality, 2010; Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality, 2017; Murray, 1987). Urban processes and experiences like spatial decay and property disinvestment are not exclusive to Thaba Nchu or to the secondary city it is a part of. In the US city of Detroit, derelict neighbourhoods and unsafe public spaces are experienced as (social) products of post-industrialisation, racial segregation, deliberate underdevelopment and poverty (Nassauer & Raskin, 2014). In response to the dire socio-spatial situation in Thaba Nchu, Mangaung adopted “a people-centred approach...to achieving social justice...where rural and urban areas are integrated, reinforcing an efficient system in which all people have access to opportunities” (Mangaung Local Municipality, 2010, p. 7). This meant using green public spaces—or parks—in the rural town to improve the spatial quality of the surrounding environment along with the social life of its inhabitants. Driehoek Neighbourhood Park and Old Regional Park in Thaba Nchu are additional public spaces informing this Lefebvrian analysis of Mangaung.

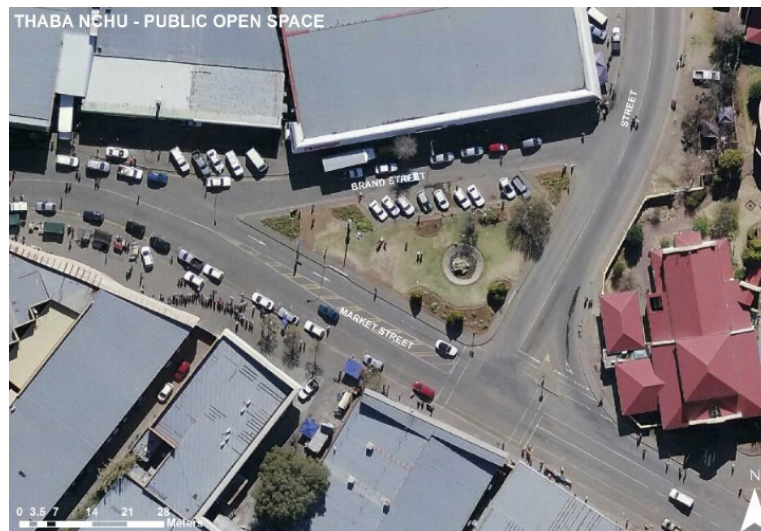
##### 4.2.1. Driehoek Neighbourhood Park

Driehoek Neighbourhood Park (DNP) is a small, triangular shaped conceived space in Thaba Nchu’s CBD. It is surrounded by commercial buildings, the community cultural centre and banks. DNP features several trees, succulents, rocks, grass, bare soil, small stones, official and private advertising boards, and three benches. DNP also has an 11-car parking lot which is neatly incorporated into its geometric design (see Figure 5). DNP is conceived as “a public or private open space” that must be “frequently used by the surrounding community for relaxation, recreation, sport, economic or any other acceptable social function” (Mangaung Local Government, 2007, p. 1). Both the public and the private sectors use DNP and very little tension arises from their uses and occupation of it.

DNP was strategically introduced in Thaba Nchu in an effort to improve the environmental health of the rural town’s declined CBD. The uses of parks for neighbourhood upliftment is a spatial practice that is in line with what US city governments are doing for impoverished or blighted neighbourhoods (Lee, Jordan, & Horsley, 2015; Wolch, Byrne, & Newell, 2014):

We need to prioritise previously disadvantaged areas...for the development of parks. (D. Coetsee, personal communication, July 25, 2017)





**Figure 5.** Driehoek Neighbourhood Park. Source: Kagisano (n.d.).

The open design of DNP supports the ebbs and flows of human and vehicular traffic. As shown in Figure 6, inhabitants transform the conceived DNP into a lived space, by overlaying its “physical space” and “making symbolic use of its objects” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 39).

Users of DNP vary in terms of age, gender and race. Though the homeless use DNP, there are fewer of them here than on Hoffman Square, which testifies to the representational nature of DNP. Women are the dominant users of DNP since most of them work in the town and take their lunch breaks in the park. Some run errands in the town and rest there between their domestic routines; others wait there for the surrounding businesses to open:

[DNP] is a good space for having lunch because some shops do not have seating areas for eating. (User 1, personal communication, August 9, 2017)

I’m resting to allow my high blood to go down....This is my third use of this space just for today...! There’s shade from the trees for when the sun gets too hot. (User 2, personal communication, August 10, 2017)

Despite its conceived uses, conflict emerged between lived space and the symbolic systems it overlays, as per Lefebvre’s (1991) binary dialectic of the spatial triad. In 2015, DNP had a pond as its central feature. Inhabitants started using it to wash cars and for bathing—a social practice prohibited by the municipal by-laws of 2007. To enforce order, the city replaced the pond with a solid feature. In response, inhabitants formed an alliance with their spatial neighbours in the cultural centre (building in Figure 6), to provide them with water to allow them to continue washing cars at DNP. To date, there has been no policing of inhabitants’ informal economic practice of washing cars. Despite its contradictions—which inhabi-



**Figure 6.** In diurnal spatial practice. Source: photograph by author.

tants overcome—Mangaung has created a conducive environment for public space experiences and uses. Its current challenge is to cultivate a culture of environmental responsibility in all areas under its jurisdiction:

We've implemented a strategy called 'adopt-a-park' to encourage the community to take ownership of open spaces, to partner with the municipality by adopting open space...picking up papers and watering trees...it's voluntary. (D. Coetsee, personal communication, July 25, 2017)

The strategy is a 'cry and demand' for 'environmental civility', a socio-spatial state of affairs that refers to well-kept and clean public spaces (Varna & Damiano, 2013). The DNP is a popular site for active-passive uses like sitting and eating while resting. Even though eating is a dominant social practice, there are no waste-disposal facilities on site to support this practice. As a result, users tend simply to throw their waste on the ground, littering DNP incessantly. The wind that powers through the town centre also sweeps up paper, plastic and soft-drink cans from the littered streets and dumps them in DNP. Linear-cyclical rhythms in this regard, conspire in the reproduction of environmental incivility in DNP, whose spatial practices—despite their monotony—vary with users, and between night and day. Linear rhythms pick up from 07:00 in the morning as inhabitants traverse the park. By 08:45, users begin to cluster in the park and its parking lot. By 11:00, DNP is in full use as users' movements and commotions—caused by the wind and wind-blown litter, trees and dust, the sound of music from the street speakers of the surrounding shops, vehicle noises, stray dogs and birds, and the billowing smoke from the public kitchen across the street—secrete the society's rhythmic spatial practice. Around 16:45, high-frequency linear-

cyclical rhythms slow down and by 18:00, activities and processes of the day are arrested. The night comes and has its full moment in the space, turning Thaba Nchu's CBD into a temporary ghost town until daylight returns to trigger the mundane experiences undergirding everyday life. To borrow from Lefebvre (2004, p. 74), there is no "Saturday Night Fever" in Thaba Nchu's CBD and in DNP—nor is it there in Bloemfontein's CBD and its Hoffman Square.

#### 4.2.2. Old Regional Park

The Old Regional Park (ORP) is a conceived space in Thaba Nchu's outer CBD. It is situated about 400 metres from the town centre (Figure 7). ORP differs from DNP and from Hoffman Square in that it is a circumscribed public space to which access and time of use are controlled. Both the spatial configuration of ORP's enclosure and the fact that it is subject to human surveillance result from its geographical proximity to a gated, private hotel and casino.

Some public spaces in Mangaung have imposed time constraints and ORP is one such space (Mangaung Local Government, 2007). In the same way that users' space is lived, so is users' time. Lived time is "apprehended within space—in the very heart of space: the hour of the day" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 95). The use of time by the conceiver to control spatial access and the lack of time for the lived to appropriate ORP fragments everyday life (Lefebvre, 2004). Fencing and human surveillance are symbolic forms of physical exclusion: they regulate a public space's time-uses (Varna & Tiesdell, 2010). Physical exclusion in ORP is not intentional since it is not in the interest of Mangaung to produce exclusive and exclusionary public spaces in Thaba Nchu. As regards its representations, ORP has lighting infrastructure that is dysfunctional, thus



**Figure 7.** The laid-back rhythm of Old Regional Park. Source: photograph by author.

evoking Lefebvre's (1991) 'double-illusion'. On the one hand, there is the realistic illusion that makes 'objects', like lighting or trees in public space, seem more real and important than the 'subjects' using them; on the other, there is the illusion of transparency that presents ORP as a luminous space that allows action to reign free, with its enclosed design serving "as mediator...between mental activity (invention) and social activity" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 28). In terms of the realistic illusion, I assumed that human surveillance at ORP was for users. However, according to the Mangaung horticulturalist, human surveillance is deployed "to look after assets of the park, not to monitor the behaviour of park users" (S. Feketshane, personal communication, August 6, 2017). Regarding the illusion of transparency, I assumed ORP's nine lighting posts to be functional. The horticulturalist again noted that the lights "work and [they] will soon be replaced with LED lighting" (S. Feketshane, personal communication, August 6, 2017). In practice, though, the lights turned out not to be functional, and in that, ORP's spatial arrhythmia (secret) was exposed. The illusion of transparency thus fell back into the realistic illusion:

I have been working here since November 2014, there's no electricity...Last week was really cold [-2 °C] and I was here working. (P. Doe, personal communication, August 23, 2017)

This dynamic, along with ORP's isolation from paved roads, and the facts of closure and enclosure renders ORP both inaccessible and invisible particularly at night. This spatial condition is understood as visual impermeability resulting from design and locational factors that prevent certain spaces from being seen or appropriated at night (Varna & Tiesdell, 2010). For this reason, ORP is perceived as a 'slippery space' that disappears at night until diurnal rhythm returns to illuminate it. Users want ORP to be fully functional:

We want lights to work at night. We want it [ORP] open from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. because it's a public place! We want security for the night shift. (User 1, personal communication, August 28, 2017)

Beyond its spatial illusions and cyclical visual inaccessibility, ORP is a lived space with a slow rhythm. Its users trickle in in small numbers from about 08:30 until about 16:45. Its diurnal tempo is slow because of the leisurely nature of the social activities and movements performed in it:

I don't use the open space in town [DNP] because it's overcrowded. (User 3, personal communication, August 3, 2017)

I come here in the mornings to run...to listen to myself. (User 4, personal communication, August 3, 2017)

Festivals, as "rites of intimate convivialities or external sociability" (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 94), contribute to ORP's spatial practice:

The last time I was here, there was a family wedding. (User 2, personal communication, August 3, 2017)

A lot of kids come...mostly in December....Some drink...and want to get into fights....The police help us to evict them. (P. Doe, personal communication, August 28, 2017)

Our parks are safe....We have officers patrolling [DNP] where ATM scams happen in December and every month-end...[ORP] has its own municipality-contracted security agency...[we] assist with mostly alcohol-related incidents. (C. Lenyatsa, personal communication, August 9, 2017)

Mangaung develops its public spaces "with the goal of achieving and addressing the recreational needs of the community" (D. Coetsee, personal communication, July 25, 2017). This conception tends to ignore the material realities of the rural town: "[s]chool is free. The money in our school goes to property maintenance....Our kids vandalise property...they are bitter" (M. Mphaki, personal communication, August 9, 2017). It is necessary that Mangaung should think differently about Thaba Nchu's parks if these are to have a practical impact on users' everyday lives:

We cannot allow our open spaces to be damaged by [big] events...our parks are there for recreation, socialisation and relaxation. (D. Coetsee, personal communication, July 25, 2017)

The city needs to be concerned about the users and inhabitants since they have a damaging effect on city parks. In ORP, uncollected consumption waste accumulates in a marshy gully below the boardwalk (Figure 8, left). Broken glass is the norm on concrete surfaces where children play (Figure 8, right). Of the ten waste-disposal bins, only one contained some litter (Figure 9, right). Run-off from one of the taps created marshy conditions beneath the play infrastructure (Figure 9, left). These conditions are potentially dangerous to both children and birds of ORP.

A society's spatial practice secretes that society's space (Lefebvre, 1991). Environmental incivility is a social practice that secretes environmentally degraded space. Inhabitants' unchecked spatial practices of environmental incivility are changing the physical and environmental quality of ORP and DNP. Even though cyclical rhythms are party to spatial incivility, linear rhythms are the main culprits in the spatial production of environmental incivility in ORP and DNP.

Inhabitants and specialists in Thaba Nchu and Bloemfontein alike are aware of the arrhythmic state of affairs:





**Figure 8.** Waste in the gully (left); unsupervised children playing barefoot (right). Source: photographs by author.



**Figure 9.** Marshy conditions beneath play infrastructure (left) and an underutilised waste-disposal bin and light post (right). Source: photographs by author.

I don't like the vandalism going on in this park. (User 3, personal communication, August 3, 2017)

You'd be disappointed to see the litter under the bridge...birds die there. (User 1, personal communication, August 28, 2017)

The female toilets have been locked for weeks because there's a fault with the flushing system....We had a notice on the men's toilets....People are always vandalising order boards. (S. Feketshane, personal communication, August 6, 2017)

It may be that the city doesn't have capacity or they have...but it's not enough...at the rate people vandalise and throw out their rubbish, they [Mangaung] won't be able to maintain [public spaces]. (F. Karstel, personal communication, July 27, 2017)

## 5. The Rhythms and Spatial Practices of Mangaung's Public Spaces

Mangaung's public spaces are material expressions of Lefebvre's rhythmic spatial triad. Hoffman Square, DNP

and ORP are conceived public spaces that are similar in their representational spatial practices, though they differ in spatial design and location in Mangaung's CBDs. Mangaung's public spaces are political in their daily reproduction and governance. They have been conceived as cohesion-building tools for their historically segregated African inhabitants who before 1994, had unequal access to the city, and unequal rights in participating in the social reproduction of Bloemfontein's public spaces. Today, because of the democratic city's social justice approach to, and political redress through, public spatial planning (Mangaung Local Municipality, 2010), one finds spatial appropriation of the highest order in Mangaung. While the city does not as yet recognise the practical capacity of its public spaces to support a host of informal socio-economic practices—like car washing in DNP, and the selling and buying of goods and services at Hoffman Square—it is however exploring informal street trading for urban renewal (Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality, 2017). Interestingly, Hart and Roger-son's (1989) policy analysis of Bloemfontein argued for the street-vending sector to be perceived as an effective means through which high unemployment levels of the then apartheid city could be addressed. Hoff-



man Square, ORP and DNP present themselves as ideal sites for expanding—and exploring further—organised informal economic uses of public spaces by inhabitants beyond the city's streets. Despite its democratic governance of public spaces, Mangaung struggles to contain and manage the levels of environmental incivility that are reproduced in its public spaces by inhabitants and nature. In Mangaung environmental incivility in the conceived spaces is a spatial practice secreted by lived space. Linear-cyclical rhythms collude in the spatial reproduction of a decayed colonial war monument in a littered Hoffman Square. Despite the large number of concrete waste-bins in Hoffman Square, inhabitants drop their consumption waste in and around the Square, leaving the wind to sweep it up and scatter it throughout the CBD. This is also the case in Thaba Nchu's DNP. This perpetual spatial condition persists because of Mangaung's anti-privatisation policies, its incapacity to manage environmental waste and users' arrhythmic practices that secrete littered and vandalised public spaces. In terms of the 'use-value' and 'exchange-value' dialectic of public spaces, Mangaung's public spaces have a higher use-value that is generated from and through inhabitants' daily uses and abuses. Their exchange-value is lower because of Mangaung's logical rejection of for-profit uses and the private management of its public spaces—processes that affect the 'publicness' of public spaces and their use-value (Landman, 2016; Varna & Damiano, 2013). It is the tradition or spatial practice of the conceived space to dominate lived space and time-uses of the lived in public space. In Mangaung, however, the conceived space produces public spaces "for appropriation and for use...against exchange and domination" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 368). Even though it is careful not to commodify its public spaces, Mangaung plans to import the CIDs model for urban regeneration (Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality, 2017, pp. 219–227), this in a city in which users struggle to pay a minimal fee for using Hoffman Square's toilet:

They [the city] say that the toilet here is public but I have to pay R2. How is it public? Because of that, people don't use that toilet. They pee behind the generator there [pointing] and it smells....People can't afford that. (User 1, personal communication, August 11, 2017)

Urinating in public space is evidence of a pathological rhythm or arrhythmia that does not discriminate between the public spaces under analysis. Social pathology breeds environmental incivility. Inhabitants' unabated littering and unmonitored acts of vandalism are indications that these spaces are in crisis, and that they are indeed threatened by the very users for whom they are conceived and publicly managed. In an economically challenged secondary city, commodification of public space is not (as yet) a viable option (Hoogendoorn, et al., 2008). Creative means and public education

strategies—perhaps beginning with the 'adopt-a-park' strategy—must therefore be explored if public space incivility in Mangaung is to be mitigated. If Mangaung's public spaces continue in their neglected and decaying state, future inhabitants of the city will have no healthy lived spaces in which to socialise, relax and play, and from which to generate sustainable livelihoods. Sadly, Ramoroka and Tsheola's (2014, p. 64) analysis that dirt and decay in the non-commodified urban public spaces of South Africa are "the exclusive preserves of black populations", is also true of Mangaung.

## 6. Conclusion

This article explored three public spaces in Mangaung using Henri Lefebvre's (1991, 2004) spatial concepts of The POS and ERA. The spatial politics explored and experienced in Mangaung are significantly different from traditional politics of public space uses from elsewhere. In Mangaung, public spaces are not used as common sites for collective protest action and perpetual marginalization by neoliberal capitalism. Instead, the struggle is for the actual physical public spaces against social processes and natural rhythms which subject the conceived representational spaces to harsh environmental conditions and social practices that deteriorate their physical appearance and diminish their potential economic value *for inhabitants*. In Mangaung, the conventional social dialectic between the dominant conceived space and the dominated lived space, is inverted. This is largely due to Mangaung's urban-rural geographical profile that informs the city's spatial plans and governance strategies: the latter consciously promoting the production of representational public spaces. It remains to be seen whether the harmonious dialectic—between Mangaung and its inhabitants—and the disharmonious dialectic—between users and public spaces—will still hold when CID strategies, for example, become an attainable reality in Mangaung.

## Acknowledgements

Thanks to the University of the Free State for the time and the funds to work in Thaba Nchu. Warm thanks to Richard Ballard, Manfred Spocter, Inocent Moyo, Lochner Marais and blind reviewers for their inputs. Special thanks to Mangaung's inhabitants, business sector and metropolitan government officials, for making this work possible.

## Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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